PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILING OF NATIONAL LEVEL MALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS: A SURVEY STUDY

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A

Synopsis

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Certificate

I hereby declare that the short synopsis "Psychological Profiling of National Level Male Football Players: A Survey Study" being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Physical education to Lakshmibai National Institute of Physical Education, Gwalior during the academic year 2022-23, is a bonafide record of original work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Rahul Kanojiya and has not been submitted in full or part to any other university or institute for a degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop a comprehensive psychological profile of national-level male football players in India by assessing key psychological constructs such as task and ego orientation, anxiety, cognitive ability, mental toughness, and mental skills. A total of 150 players, selected through purposive sampling, will be drawn from prestigious tournaments including the Santosh Trophy, Indian Super League, I-League, Durand Cup, AIFF competitions, and the Kalinga Super Cup. Using standardized and validated psychological tools, data will be collected through a structured survey method. Statistical analysis will be conducted using SPSS (version 26), employing descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis with a significance level set at 0.05. The expected outcomes of the study include high task orientation, moderate ego orientation, low to moderate anxiety levels, high cognitive ability, strong mental toughness, and well-developed mental skills among the participants. Furthermore, positive correlations are anticipated between mental toughness, cognitive ability, and mental skills, while anxiety is expected to negatively correlate with both performance and mental resilience. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for coaches, sport psychologists, and talent development professionals by identifying the psychological strengths and needs of elite football players, thereby informing effective psychological training, talent identification, and performance enhancement strategies.

Keywords: National-Level Football Players, Psychological Profiling, Task and Ego Orientation, Anxiety, Cognitive Ability, Mental Toughness, Mental Skills, Sports Psychology, Elite Athletes, Performance Optimization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Football (soccer) represents one of the most widely practiced sports globally, characterized by its complex psychological and physiological demands. At the national level, male football players face intense competitive pressures that require exceptional physical abilities complemented by robust psychological resources (F. Gucciardi et al., 2020). The psychological profile of elite football players has emerged as a critical area of investigation within sports science research, with growing evidence suggesting that psychological factors can differentiate between successful and unsuccessful performers even when physical attributes are comparable (Fortes et al., 2019). The modern competitive football environment demands players who can perform consistently under pressure, maintain focus during prolonged matches, cope with performance anxieties, and demonstrate adaptive motivational orientations (Olmedilla et al., 2018). As the tactical and technical aspects of football have evolved, the psychological dimension has gained increasing recognition as a determining factor in athletic success at elite levels (Castillo-Rodríguez et al., 2017). This research aims to develop a comprehensive psychological profile of national-level male football players by examining key psychological constructs: task and ego orientation, anxiety, cognitive ability, mental toughness, and mental skills. Understanding these psychological dimensions can provide valuable insights for coaches, sport psychologists, and talent identification specialists working with elite male footballers.

This study addresses several critical gaps in sports science research. First, while numerous studies have examined isolated psychological factors in football, comprehensive profiling investigations that simultaneously assess multiple psychological constructs in elite male football players remain scarce (Clemente et al., 2014). Second, the potential interaction effects between these psychological variables have not been thoroughly explored, limiting our understanding of how they collectively contribute to performance outcomes (Clancy et al., 2016). Moreover, this research responds to calls for more context-specific studies in sport psychology. The unique psychological demands of football at the national level warrant dedicated investigation rather than generalizing findings from other sports or competitive levels (Swann et al., 2015). By focusing specifically on national-level male football players, this study provides ecologically valid insights that can inform precise, population-specific interventions. Additionally, this research contributes to the emerging field of talent identification and

development in football. As professional clubs and national federations invest increasingly in talent identification programs, understanding the psychological profile of successful players can help refine selection criteria and developmental approaches (Sæther, 2017).

Motivational orientation plays a fundamental role in elite football performance. Task orientation (focusing on personal improvement and mastery) and ego orientation (focusing on outperforming others) represent distinct motivational dispositions that influence how players approach training and competition (Zuber & Conzelmann, 2019). In the highly competitive environment of national-level football, understanding players' motivational orientations can provide insights into their adaptability to coaching, response to feedback, and resilience following setbacks. Research suggests that elite male footballers typically demonstrate a balanced profile with high task orientation complemented by moderate ego orientation, allowing them to pursue personal excellence while thriving in competitive environments (Olmedilla et al., 2018). Performance anxiety represents a significant psychological challenge for footballers competing at national levels, where stakes are high and public scrutiny is intense. The relationship between anxiety and performance follows the well-established inverted-U hypothesis, suggesting optimal performance occurs at moderate anxiety levels (Castillo-Rodríguez et al., 2017). For male football players, excessive anxiety can impair decision-making, reduce technical precision, and diminish tactical awareness during crucial moments. Understanding anxiety profiles can help develop tailored interventions to optimize arousal levels and performance under pressure. The tactical complexity of modern football demands sophisticated cognitive abilities. Decision-making speed, anticipation, situational awareness, and tactical understanding represent cognitive dimensions critical for success at elite levels (Fortes et al., 2019). National-level male footballers must process multiple information streams simultaneously while executing technical skills under temporal constraints. Assessing cognitive abilities specific to football contexts provides valuable insights into players' capacity to adapt to evolving tactical demands and make optimal decisions under pressure. Mental toughness encompasses perseverance, resilience, confidence, and focus, attributes particularly relevant for male footballers competing at national levels where physical and psychological challenges are magnified (F. Gucciardi et al., 2020). Mental toughness enables players to maintain performance standards through grueling competitive schedules, recover from setbacks, manage performance pressure, and sustain concentration during critical match phases. Understanding mental toughness profiles can inform the development of psychological

interventions aimed at enhancing resilience in elite male footballers. The application of specific mental skills, including visualization, self-talk, goalsetting, and concentration techniques, represents a trainable dimension of psychological preparation for elite footballers (Clemente et al., 2014). National-level male football players encounter unique psychological challenges requiring specialized mental skills. Assessment of mental skills proficiency can identify development areas and inform psychological training programs tailored to football-specific demands. By comprehensively examining these five psychological dimensions in national-level male football players, this research aims to create an integrated psychological profile that advances theoretical understanding while providing practical applications for performance enhancement in elite football contexts.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the study stated as **"Psychological Profiling of National Level Male Football Players: A Survey Study".**

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- The research work will be carried out with the following objectives in perspective:
- The study will aim to assess the task and ego orientation levels of national level male football players.
- It will examine the anxiety levels (both state and trait) among national level male football players.
- The study will seek to evaluate the cognitive abilities of the players in relation to their performance demands.
- It will analyze the degree of mental toughness exhibited by national level male football players.
- The study will aim to identify the mental skills commonly employed by these athletes.

HYPOTHESIS

On the basis of the evidence available in the literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- H_1: The levels of task and ego orientation will be significantly balanced among national-level male football players.

- H_2: The level of anxiety will be significantly low to moderate among national-level male football players.
- H_3: The cognitive ability of national-level male football players will be significantly high, reflecting their advanced decision-making and situational awareness.
- H_4: National-level male football players will exhibit a significantly high degree of mental toughness, enabling them to perform under pressure.
- H_5: The level of mental skills will be significantly high among national-level male football players.

DELIMITATION

- The study will be delimited to 150 national level male football players.
- The study will be delimited to the male player of age 18-35 years.
- Data will be collected exclusively from football players who have participated in the Santosh Trophy, Indian Super League, I-League, Durand Cup, AIFF, Kalinga Super Cup
- The study will be delimited to the selected psychological variables which are as follows: Task and ego orientation, Anxiety, Cognitive ability, Mental toughness, Mental skills.

LIMITATION

- Maintaining Focus: Players may struggle with restlessness, have a reduced attention span, and find it challenging to comprehend or retain spoken instructions.
- Filtering Distractions: Players might find it difficult to ignore surrounding noises, visual distractions, or smells that disrupt their concentration during tasks.
- Apprehension Toward Authority: Players may feel uneasy or reluctant to engage with the researcher due to perceived authority.
- Uncontrollable Lifestyle Factors: The researcher may not be able to regulate or influence the personal lifestyle habits of the athletes.

DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION OF THE TERMS

Task and ego orientation

Task orientation refers to a motivational disposition in which an individual's primary focus is on mastering skills, personal improvement, and task completion based on self-referenced

standards of achievement. Task-oriented athletes evaluate their competence through comparing current performance with their own previous performances rather than with the performances of others (Nicholls, 1989). Ego orientation is a motivational disposition characterized by a focus on demonstrating superiority over others and evaluating success through normative comparisons rather than personal improvement. Ego-oriented individuals define competence as outperforming others while demonstrating equivalent or superior ability with less effort (Roberts et al., 1998).

Anxiety

Athletic anxiety represents a multidimensional psychological state characterized by subjective feelings of apprehension and tension accompanied by heightened physiological arousal. Sport anxiety typically comprises cognitive anxiety (negative thoughts, worries about performance), somatic anxiety (physiological manifestations such as increased heart rate, muscle tension), and concentration disruption (difficulty maintaining attentional focus) (Smith et al., 2006).

Cognitive ability

In sports psychology, cognitive ability encompasses a range of mental processes that support athletic performance, including decision-making speed, anticipation, pattern recognition, situational awareness, tactical understanding, and problem-solving capabilities under pressure (Voss et al., 2010).

Mental toughness

Mental toughness represents a psychological resource that enables athletes to consistently perform at high levels despite challenges, pressures, and adversities. It encompasses attributes including resilience, confidence, commitment, concentration abilities, emotional regulation, and perseverance in pursuing long-term goals despite obstacles (Gucciardi et al., 2015).

Mental skills

Mental skills represent specific psychological techniques and strategies that athletes intentionally employ to optimize psychological states for performance. These include goalsetting, imagery/visualization, self-talk, concentration techniques, arousal regulation strategies, and pre-performance routines (Weinberg & Gould, 2018).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The study will help to know and understand the present psychological status of national level male football players.
- Besides it will help the coaches and managers to better understand the players and in turn be able to bring out the best performance from them.
- The study will aid the players themselves to know their own aggression, anxiety, cognitive ability, mental toughness, and stress on them accordingly to be able to give their best performance every time they enter the field.
- The players will benefit the most from this study as they will know what level of psychological skills is required to play at the professional level.
- This study will help the P.E. teachers, coaches, selectors, and administrators who are in some way or the other linked in the process of sports team selection to get a better insight into the psychological factors involved in sports performance specifically in the game of football.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Ayas & Biçer, (2021) conducted a study to determine the effect of perfectionism levels and goal orientation types on the individuals who played licensed basketball in the past, to continue their basketball life at a professional/amateur level or dropped out basketball. Methods: The sample of the study consists of a licensed basketball history, a total of 150 participants who continue at the amateur level (50), professional level (50), and dropped out basketball/continue as a hobby (50). Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire developed by Duda et al. (1992) to determine types of goal orientation and Multidimensional Perfectionism Questionnaire (Frost et al., 1990) to predict perfectionism levels were used to collect data. The data analyzed with SPSS 25.0 program with one-way ANOVA and Pearson correlation analyses. Results: As a result of analyses, there were no significant differences between task and ego orientation and perfectionism and sport continuation types of participants. It was also found that according to correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between task and ego orientation among the styles of continuing sports; a statistically significant positive moderate relationship between task and ego orientation score of participants who dropped out basketball and continue at an amateur level; on the other hand, a high positive correlation was found between goal orientation and ego orientation of those who continue at professional level. Conclusion: Results provide a richer understanding of the effects of goals orientations with perfectionism and their relationship to performance and have implications on sport continuation.

Hpn et al., (2019) investigated the relationship between goal orientation and performance in team sports players. The Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) was used for the assessment of goals. The observed variable of the study was perceived performance and was measured through a likert scale questionnaire, which had been adopted from literature. Subjective performances of the players were considered. Data was collected from Sri Lankan national team players who are engaged in team sports of football, basketball, Elle, volleyball, Hockey, Kabaddi, Netball, Rugby and Throw ball. The study population was 308 national team

players and the universal sampling technique was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS and structural equation modelling with AMOS. The study results reveal that there is a significant association between goal orientation and performance of the players while a significant relationship exists between task orientation and performance. A moderate level of association was derived from ego orientation which in turn leads to performance.

Ceylan, (2022) conducted a study to compare the mental toughness skills of national and elite athletes who actively do sports. The study group consisted of 204 active sports students, 160 males and 44 females, studying in physical education and sports teaching, coaching education and sports management departments in sports sciences faculties. 130 elite athletes and 74 national athletes participated in the study. The Sport Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ14), developed by Sheard et al. (2009) in order to determine the mental toughness levels of athletes, consists of 14 items. SPSS 25.0 program was used for the analysis and statistical operations of the data obtained from the students. Primarily, the kurtosis and skewness coefficients were examined to determine whether the parametric tests met the basic assumptions. It was observed that the obtained scores met the normality assumption. Then, the data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, T-test, ANOVA test. There was a significant difference in the “Confidence” sub-dimension of SMTQ-14 scores according to age groups (t=3.539; p< 0.001). No significant difference was found in all other variables (p> 0.05). As a result of the study, there was a significant difference in favor of the athletes who are over 21 years old in the "Confidence" sub-dimension according to age groups. It can be said that athletes who are over 21 years old are better at believing in their abilities and thinking that they are better than their competitors in order to reach their goal in difficult situations that require struggle.

Baro et al., (2016) examined the relationship between the sports psychological profile and competitive anxiety in a group of beach handball players. 112 under-19's and adult players aged between 17 and 32 years (M = 23.23; SD = 6.81) took part in the study. 55.36% of the participants were male (n = 62) and 44.64% were female (n = 50). The Psychological Inventory of Sports Performance (IPED) was used to analyse the psychological profile of the participants and the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) to evaluate their state of anxiety and self-confidence. The correlation of the analysis and linear regression carried out revealed significant relationships between the studied constructs. For the total sample, negative coping control and motivational level were the best predictors of anxiety, with negative and positive coping control being the most important predictors of confidence. Some differences existed

depending on gender in all the models. The results found revealed a relationship between the variables analysed and they suggest that knowledge about psychological sporting profiles could help analyse the state of anxiety and confidence in athletes.

Van Biesen et al., (2016) investigated group and individual differences in cognitive profiles in a large cohort of track and field athletes, basketball players, swimmers and table tennis players with (N = 468) and without (N = 162) intellectual disabilities (ID). Based on the Cattell-HornCarroll Theory of Cognitive abilities, eight subtests were selected for inclusion in a generic cognitive test (GCT) to assess executive functions and cognitive abilities relevant to sport, i.e., fluid reasoning, visual processing, reaction and decision speed, short-term memory and processing speed. Reliability coefficients for the subtests ranged between 0.25 and 0.88 respectively. Factor analysis revealed two clusters of subtests, i.e., a speed-based factor (simple and complex reaction time and simple and complex visual search) and a performance-based factor (Corsi Memory, Tower of London, WASI Block Design and Matrix Reasoning). After controlling for psychomotor speed, the group of ID-athletes scored significantly lower than athletes without ID on all the GCT subtests, except the complex visual search test. When cognitive profiles of individual ID- athletes were examined, some obtained higher scores than the average norm values in the reference population. The GCT is currently administered as part of the classification process for athletes with ID who compete in the Paralympic Games. The results of this study indicate that the complex visual search and Tower of London test in the GCT should be reconsidered.

Törngren, (2014) investigated mental skills use among adolescents practicing sports on elite levels at an upper high school education with focus on sports. Different education profiles, school years and gender were looked at in two different contexts to see whether they affect mental skills. The questionnaire PACE, investigating mental skills in 13 different scales such as process goal, self-confidence and relaxation, was administered to 163 upper high school students, 101 males and 62 females. The participants were distributed between two different education profiles “National Sport Education” and “Physical Education Specialization”, two different school years, year one and year two and the contexts investigated was either training or competition. A significant difference in mental skills was found between males and females in both practice and competition contexts. Females were found to report less self-confidence, lower outcome goal and less effective stress management, indicating the need for teachers and coaches to better address these issues. No significant difference was found between different

education profiles in neither practice nor competition contexts. Also no significant difference was found between students in different school years, in neither of the two contexts. The upper high school athletes are training and competing in complex environments both at school and in their sport clubs. Since all types of environments and contexts influence mental skills it is suggested that both schools and sport clubs should try to find ways to improve females' selfconfidence and provide help to set realistic goals.

CHAPTER III

SELECTION OF SUBJECTS

For the purpose of this study, a total of 150 national-level male football players will be selected as subjects. The participants will be those who have represented their respective states or union territories in the Santosh Trophy, Indian Super League, I-League, Durand Cup, AIFF and the Kalinga Super Cup a prestigious national football tournaments in India. The selection will be based on purposive sampling, ensuring that only athletes who meet the criteria of national-level representation are included. All subjects will be between the age group of approximately 18 to 30 years, actively competing, and medically fit at the time of data collection. Prior to participation, the purpose and procedures of the study will be explained to the players, and informed consent will be obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be maintained throughout the study.

SELECTION OF VARIABLES

Psychological variables		
Sl.no.	Variables	Tools
I	Task and ego orientation	Task and ego orientation questionnaire is developed by Joan L. Duda and John G. Nicholls Source: Duda, J.L., Chi, L., Newton, M.L., Walling, M.D. and Catley, D. (1995).
II	Anxiety	The state trait anxiety inventory (Spielberger, 1989)
III	Cognitive ability	The Cognitive Assessment Questionnaire Broadbent et al. (1982)
IV	Mental toughness	Sports Mental toughness questionnaire (Sheard, & van Wersch, 2009)

V	Mental skills	Bull's Mental skill questionnaire (1996)

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study will be collected through a survey method using standardized psychological questionnaires relevant to the selected variables: task and ego orientation, anxiety, cognitive ability, mental toughness, and mental skills. Prior to data collection, necessary permissions will be obtained from the concerned authorities, coaches, and team managers of the participating football teams involved in national-level tournaments such as the Santosh Trophy, Indian Super League (ISL), I-League, Durand Cup, AIFF competitions, and the Kalinga Super Cup. A brief orientation will be given to all participants explaining the purpose of the study, instructions for filling out the questionnaires, and assurances regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation. The players will be requested to respond honestly and sincerely to all items in the questionnaires. Data collection will take place at suitable locations such as training camps, competition venues, or team accommodations, depending on logistical feasibility and team schedules. The researcher will remain present during the administration of the questionnaires to clarify any doubts and to ensure completeness of responses. After collection, the data will be checked, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis using appropriate software. All ethical standards related to informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality will be strictly followed throughout the process

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES

The data collected from 150 national-level male football players will be analyzed using the SPSS (version 20). Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation will be used to summarize the data. To examine the relationships between psychological variables such as task and ego orientation, anxiety, cognitive ability, mental toughness, and mental skills, Pearson's correlation coefficient will be applied. The level of significance for all statistical tests will be set at 0.05.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The expected outcome of this study is that national-level male football players will exhibit a high level of task orientation and a moderate level of ego orientation, indicating a balanced motivational profile conducive to consistent performance. It is anticipated that these players

will demonstrate low to moderate levels of anxiety, reflecting effective coping mechanisms under pressure. Their cognitive abilities, including decision-making, situational awareness, and problem-solving, are expected to be high, enabling them to adapt effectively to dynamic game situations. Additionally, the players are likely to show a high degree of mental toughness, characterized by confidence, resilience, and focus during competition. Well-developed mental skills such as goal-setting, imagery, self-talk, and concentration strategies are also expected to be prevalent among the participants. The study further anticipates significant positive correlations between mental toughness, cognitive ability, and mental skills, and a significant negative correlation between anxiety and both performance-related mental skills and psychological resilience. These outcomes will help in identifying psychological strengths and development areas, contributing to better athlete profiling, training interventions, and performance optimization strategies in elite football.

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